Released for Press use

NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 15 TORONTO May, 1942

ULTRA-ANTIQUE PEARLS

How old must a pearl be before it becomes an antique? We don't know exactly but surely 100,000,000 years is sufficient! The Royal Ontario Museum has four pearls which date back to the age of dinosaurs. Dr. Madeleine Fritz of that institution tells us that these ultra-antiques are a rare fossil found in Kansas. Similar specimens have been found in association with a large clam-like mollusk known as Inoceramus which can be regarded as the pearl producer par excellence of its time.

The specimens now on exhibit in the Museum are not of great beauty. If once they possessed the rich lustre of modern pearls time has erased all this. They are lustreless, yellowish-grey objects ranging in size from a small pea to a marble. Though jewellers might undervalue them not so the palaeontologist. That these specimens are authentic pearls has been proven by a study of their structure.

It has been commonly held that pearl-making in the living bivalve, oysters, clams, etc., is stimulated by irritation from a grain of sand lodged between the mantle and shell. It is now thought that in most instances parasitic worms provide the irritation, not sand. If such is the case, there is some truth in the statement that "the most beautiful pearl is only the brilliant sarcophagus of a worm."

BIG FISH AND LITTLE FISH

"Fish, like anglers, come in many sizes and shapes," says Professor J.R. Dymond of the Royal Ontario Museum. Take trout, for example. In the Great Lakes they may attain a weight of 40 pounds and are usually green or grey. The same species of fish living in small lakes are usually much darker in colour and mature at a weight of a few pounds. The colour of the flesh varies too, from a rich salmon, through cream to almost white. In British Columbia there is a still more striking instance of fish diversity. In some mountain lakes occur small trout known as mountain trout which are only 8 to 10 inches long. They are brilliantly coloured and retain their dark parr markings throughout life. Fry, the young of these mountain trout, were transferred to a virgin lake, rich in food. Thereupon came the surprise. They grew much larger than their parents and lacked entirely the brilliant colour and parr marks.

In fish, as in man, each individual is the outcome of heredity and environment. But the growing fish is subjected to many different environmental influences - food, different in kind and amount; enemies; temperatures; dissolved oxygen; even the most precious thing of all, water, may dwindle.

LIGHT UP AND LISTEN

"The American Indians' gifts to the modern world have been legion and they have been important," says Mr. K.E. Kidd of the Royal Ontario Museum, "Take corn, potatoes, chocolate and quinine, for example; not to mention tomatoes, squashes, sunflowers or turkeys. Most of these things are now part of the fabric of our civilization. But none of these gifts surpasses, in the minds of men and women to-day, the significance of tobacco. Tobacco was one of the first things brought back to the Old World from the New."

"At first it did not 'take'," continued Mr. Kidd, "but we all know the importance of it at the present. Millions of pounds of it are smoked yearly. In some parts of the world, where war has made it almost unobtainable, men willingly pay a couple of dollars, or its equivalent, for just one cigarette."

Your reporter took another puff from the cigarette butt he had started to throw away.

"This now universal habit of smoking," continued the anthropologist, "began ages ago in America. Up to the time of the coming of the white man, it was pretty much a ritual, a sort of sacrifice to the gods. The tubes, or pipes, in which the tobacco was smoked were made of the most beautiful material available, carefully and reverently worked into the forms which the Indians considered the most attractive and pleasing."

"Would you like to see some of these?" asked Mr. Kidd. We would and did.

The Museum has recently placed on exhibition a large collection of Indian pipes from Ontario, where one may see the great diversity in form and decoration, from the simplest of straight tubes, to the most elaborate of effigies. Many of them are real works of art. In addition, there are illustrations of how pipes were made, and a small number of modern specimens for comparison with the old.

WAS IT YOU?

On a recent date this spring, the four-millionth visitor walked through the turnstile of the Royal Ontario Museum. Was it you?

MUSEUM'S STAFF FORMS FIRST AID CLASS

In addition to numerous A.R.P. activities, members of the Museum's staff are being schooled in first aid. A series of lectures and an examination by the St. John Ambulance Association have just been concluded. Organization of a permanent Division of the St. John Ambulance Brigade with headquarters in the Museum is under way. First-aiders will be useful to your Museum and helpful to the public when needed